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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7956  
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SUBJECT: NWFP: DETERIORATING CONDITIONS IN SWAT AMID TALK OF  
"IMMINENT" OPERATIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate  
Peshawar, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. According to Frontier Corps (FC) commander General Tariq Khan, Swat operations are imminent, but no decision has been made over whether regular army or FC will lead the operation. General Tariq, however, told Peshawar PO that FC does not have enough forces to take on Swat where militants are dug in and according to a growing number of reports are largely in control of the district's principal cities, Mingora and Saidu Sharif. FC operations in Dir and Buner remain active; northern Buner has not been secured. Overall internally displaced persons (IDP) numbers from Buner remain unclear. The Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Minister for Social Welfare told PO that she expects operations in Swat to generate a large number of IDPs at a time when the provincial government is already struggling to cope with the Buner influx of IDPs who have primarily moved into Mardan and Swabi districts in the Peshawar valley. Pakistani military officials have repeatedly expressed concerns about the lack of local capacity to handle additional IDPs, and this factor may also hold back the launch of operations in Swat. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) During a May 6 visit by 101st Airborne Division commander MG Schloesser, Frontier Corps Inspector-General (commander) General Tariq Khan provided an update of ongoing and planned Frontier Corps (FC) operations in the Malakand division and the FATA. Tariq said that Swat operations were imminent, and might commence within the next few days. Reiterating what we have been hearing, however, he noted that the questions of which organization (FC or regular army) will take the lead and which forces will participate are still unresolved. Later, Tariq told PO that he does not have enough available forces under his command to take the lead in Swat. (Note: However, ANP provincial government leaders have been clear in conversations with PO that that they favor a leading role for the FC in the Swat operation.)

¶3. (S) Tariq confirmed press reporting that northern Buner has not yet been cleared of Taliban, but said that he planned to rely on the re-activated Buner lashkar forces to perform those operations so that the Frontier Corps can move on to other operations. He provided fewer details on Dir, but acknowledged that operations there had not yet pacified the area. He noted that the recent rainy weather in the NWFP has slowed operations in the north; the cloud cover has reduced air support for FC operations to a low level.

¶4. (S) Tariq portrayed both the Dir and Buner operations as having diverted FC resources from his ongoing plans to secure the northern areas of the FATA. Tariq imminently planned another clearing operation in Bajaur Agency's Charmang valley and northwestern Mohmand Agency to cut off remaining militant elements from resupply routes through Afghanistan and to destroy any organized resistance. He claimed that many militant commanders in that area were now contacting security forces to negotiate their surrender. FC also planned an operation using its forces already deployed in Kurram Agency to trap and defeat Taliban-affiliated Sunni militia elements in lower Kurram; he noted the beneficial effect that a (currently nonexistent) north-south road through Kurram would have on the ability of the FC to operate in this area. Tariq characterized all of these operations as a prelude for an attack on the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan Agency (SWA), which he predicted would take place in June if operations in Swat went well.

¶5. (C) MG Tariq was insistent that the fighting in Buner had produced no more than 10,000 IDPs. PO met May 6 with NWFP Minister for Social Welfare Sitara Ayaz who said that overall numbers for Buner IDPs were difficult to ascertain. There was not enough experienced staff to handle registration in Mardan and Swabi districts where most of the IDPs have settled. Ayaz expressed deep concern about the government's ability to cope with additional IDPs which seemed almost a certainty once operations were launched in Swat (further details septel).

¶6. (S/NF) Comment. While the question over the appropriate lead force for Swat is likely creating some tension and delay in the start of operations in Swat, worries over the impact of additional IDPs flooding into the Peshawar valley districts is almost certainly of equal if not greater concern to Pakistani military and civilian officials. Fears of an overwhelmed government and angry IDPs in districts closer to Peshawar could lead to delays in the Swat operation. End comment.

¶7. (U) This cable has not been cleared by MG Stroesser.

TRACY